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AUTHOR Bergman, Roberta L.
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ABSTRACT

Child Care Dallas planned and implemented a project aiming to produce an employer-assisted family day care system which would meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers, increase the community supply of infant/toddler care, be affordable for parents and employers, and demonstrate effective methods for recruiting and training competent caregivers. The results, the Employer-Assisted Home Based Child Care Delivery System, was developed as a model through which employers could assist their employees in securing quality care for their infants and todders in family day homes developed specifically for them. Specific objectives of the project were to demonstrate how a home-based system could be developed to serve corporate employees, to test its cost effectiveness, to develop effective methods for recruiting and training competent caregivers, and to organize project experiences into a guide for others to use. This executive summary of the project's summary report provides a brief introduction to the project, describes project design and results, and offers recommendations for overcoming barriers encountered in implementing the project and for project replication. (RH)

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An Employer-Assisted Home Based Child Care Delivery System

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AN EMPLOYER-ASSISTED HOME BASED CHILD CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM

Roberta L. Bergman
Project Director

Grant No. 90CJ50/01
Administration for Children, Youth and Families
Washington, D.C.

Child Care Dallas
1499 Regal Row, Suite 400
Dallas, Texas 75247
(214) 630-7911

Introduction

Child Care Dallas is a United Way affiliate, founded in 1901 to provide child care services for the Dallas community. In 1960, the agency inaugurated a family day home system in the belief that substitute care for babies and toddlers is best offered by the natural, intimate setting of homes. The system was designed to legitimize and support home-based care as a profession through careful selection of caregivers, on-going training, regular monitoring, and the constant availability of staff support. The system has grown from a handful of homes in the early years to over 50 currently in operation.

The quality of the home-based experience for the children and parents' decided preference for this type of care for very young children led Child Care Dallas to the conclusion that family day care could be a new option for employers who are considering ways in which to meet the child care needs of their employees. While employer support for child care programs has increased in recent years, home-based child care as an employer option has been generally overlooked despite a number of inherent advantages:

1. the relatively small investment of time and capital required to make the service operational;

2. the affordability of home-based infant and toddler care over comparable center-based care;

3. the flexibility of a home-based system with regard to sites, hours of service, and capacity;

4. the appropriateness of quality home-based care for infants and toddlers

The objectives of the project were to develop an employer-assisted family day care system which would meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers, increase the community supply of infant/toddler care, be affordable for parents and employers, demonstrate effective methods for recruiting and training competent caregivers, and organize these experiences into a guide for others to use.

Project Design

The project demonstrated a network of "custom-developed" family day homes--developed in response to the specific needs of employees in the participating corporations. Each home cared for up to four children--only two under the age of two. Each family day home caregiver was carefully screened and selected and participated in pre-service training as well as in-service training including a college credit television course and bi-weekly visits by project staff. Each cluster of 10-12 homes was served by a family day home specialist responsible for the development of the homes, the enrollment of the families, the training and monitoring of the caregivers, and the children's program.

The role of the corporation was to provide access to the family day home system for its employees. Through its participation in the project, each corporation was obtaining child care spaces for its employees that they could not obtain on their own since there was no other community source of "custom-developed" family day homes.

Project Results

Six corporations with workforces ranging in size from 19 to 3,000 participated in the project. Two others in which meetings were held with employees to present the project could not secure top management approval, despite the recommendations of the human resources staff.

One hundred fifty three employees enrolled in the program. That is, they signed up to participate, and efforts began to develop family day homes for them. Forty-eight actually placed their children in care; fifty-three children were served.

A number of employees enrolled in the program with the intention of using the service only if they were unable to find care on their own or if there was a breakdown of their current arrangements. Sixty-three percent of those who enrolled ultimately did not use the service because the project was unable to meet their immediate need for care. The process of screening and selecting caregivers took approximately six to eight weeks; thus parents who had an urgent need for child care could not be served.

Twenty-seven percent of the enrollments occurred for children who had not yet been born. Of these families, half did not use the service, most often because the family made a child care arrangement on its own or the mother decided not to return to work.

Overall, the parents viewed the availability of the family day home system provided by their employers very positively but as one of several child care options they could consider, not the only option. If they already had children in care, they tended to stay with the existing arrangement. If they could find child care from a caregiver personally known to them or referred by someone personally known to them, they tended to prefer that over the care offered by the project.

Throughout the project period, 5,116 caregiver applicants contacted staff in response to various recruitment efforts. This number far exceeded expectations but validated the assumption that a large volume of applicants would be required in order to find appropriate caregivers. Out of every 100 applicants who passed the initial screening, ten were visited by project staff, and three were studied in depth. A total of thirty-four were selected for the project.

Ten caregiver applicants were recruited from within the participating corporations, including one employee who applied to become a caregiver, one applicant who was a member of an employee's family, and eight applicants who had been referred to the project by employees. Two were selected to become project caregivers.

Recommendations

The demonstration of an employer-assisted home-based system was successful. The program worked. The idea of family day homes had appeal to those companies considering child care for employees but unable to provide on-site care. It had appeal to companies concerned with the specific need for infant care. There was widespread interest in this child care model--the project received many inquiries from across the country and was visited by employers from Kansas City and Chicago.

Nonetheless, securing corporate participation was and will continue to be a major challenge. At the end of the project period, there were 31 employers who had reviewed the project and had made no decision regarding participation. Another 16 had considered it and had decided not to participate, and yet another 17 had been contacted and refused to consider it. Only one of the six participating corporations continued to provide the service for employees at the end of the project period when corporate funding was required to replace grant funding.

The reluctance of employers to participate and the low priority assigned to the decision-making by some employers who were at least interested proved disappointing. While these responses do not diminish the value of the model (in fact, a number were interested precisely because it was a unique model), they demonstrate that commitment to a child care model follows the commitment to child care per se.

The project's experience indicates that there are still many barriers to overcome before employers can be expected to achieve a significant role in addressing child care needs. Even where employers acknowledge that child care may be a problem for their employees (and many do not), there are simply too many vagaries in the world of business and industry which can defer or deflect plans for child care. Poor profits, corporate relocations, mergers, change of personnel staff, and change of management staff were cited by a number of the companies who did not participate. Child care was not a high priority for them and was easily dismissed when the internal or external business environment changed. Any significant departure from this practice will probably not occur until child care is widely accepted as part of the employee benefit/service package and is accorded the same priority as other elements in the package.

In the meantime, projects such as the one described herein should be replicated at the local level while policy options are developed at Federal and state levels to stimulate growth in employer-assisted child care. Somehow, child care as a benefit must become as universally accepted as health insurance, because it's clearly more work-related. Child care as a means of access to the workplace must be as universally recognized as public transportation, because it's just as essential for many workers.

The issue of financial/tax incentives for employers is complex, yet is critical to the future of employer-assisted child care. Even with credible data on the cost savings to employers resulting from employer-assisted programs (reduced absenteeism and turnover, increased productivity, etc.), employers tend to focus on the cost outlays. This view suggests the need for powerful financial incentives over a long enough period for companies to study for themselves the benefits of providing child care assistance.

The findings of this project, especially the barriers to employer participation that were identified, indicate that current private initiatives and public/private partnerships for child care are not likely to provide an immediate solution to the shortage of affordable quality child care. Instead, there is a continuing need for policy recommendations which seek not to diminish the role of government but rather to redefine it. Demonstration projects such as this one are useful and should be encouraged but only as part of a broader public child care policy which provides meaningful incentives for employers.

"DEVELOPING AN EMPLOYER-ASSISTED FAMILY DAY HOME SYSTEM"

In 1982, Child Care Dallas was awarded a grant from the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to develop a family day home system to serve employees of six corporations. The agency's experiences in this venture form the basis of a practical guidebook for corporations, child care providers, social service agencies and others who believe in the potential of day homes as a corporate child care option.

"DEVELOPING AN EMPLOYER-ASSISTED FAMILY DAY HOME SYSTEM" includes discussion of:

* why family day care is an appropriate option for employers to support
* how to determine whether the concept is viable in one's own community
* how to secure corporate participation in the system
* effective strategies for recruiting and selecting caregivers
* ways of assuring and maintaining the delivery of quality child care in the system
* parent-system relationships--from the introduction of the system inside the corporation through utilization of the homes

"DEVELOPING AN EMPLOYER-ASSISTED FAMILY DAY HOME SYSTEM" has been produced in a notebook format and includes samples of job descriptions, caregiver assessments, system procedures, and many other materials.

Copies are $16.95 and may be ordered using the attached form.

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